

INVESTIGATION

Inquiry opens into crash of Gulfstream I

The co-pilot involved in the 24 January fatal crash of a Gulfstream I in western Kenya was not qualified to fly the type, a witness has told a public inquiry.

The Gulfstream I, operated by Nairobi-based African Commuter Services, crashed during take-off from Busia airstrip, 400km (250 miles) west of the capital. The co-pilot died in the accident together with the captain and Kenya's labour minister. Several other passengers were seriously injured, including four other government ministers.

The inquiry heard that the co-pilot had recorded fictitious flying hours and used them to obtain a GI type rating on his licence. Earlier witnesses said the aircraft had had three previous accidents, one fatal. The inquiry also heard the GI was operating without a flight-data recorder, a mandatory requirement, and the cockpit voice recorder had not been working for eight months.

Kenya's Directorate of Civil Aviation, since renamed the Kenya Civil Aviation Authority, had repeatedly renewed the maintenance company's licence without an inspection.

AIRCRAFT DEVELOPMENT KATE SANSFIELD / LONDON

Single-engine turboprops fight it out for position

Weight increase for Socata's TBM 700C2 increases range to nearly 2,000km

EADS Socata has clinched US certification for its high-speed TBM 700C2 as rival European single-engine turboprop manufacturers reach various stages in their aircraft development programmes.

The six-seat C2 offers an increase in maximum take-off weight from 2,985kg (6,580lb) to 3,355kg, says the French manufacturer, designed to deliver a maximum range of 1,985km (1,075nm) at a cruise speed of 255kt (470km/h).

The \$2.65 million aircraft also has strengthened airframe components, wheels and tyres and additional new features such as a redesigned luggage compartment, a new interior with seats dynamically tested to more than 20g, a Honeywell environmental control and air-conditioning system with higher cooling capacity and automatic temperature control. An additional luggage compartment is behind the pressurised cabin.

The C2 variant will only be available in the countries accepting Amendment 44 of US FAR 23, says Socata. This allows at maximum take-off weight an increase in the aircraft's stall speed from 61kt to 65kt, if the seats are reinforced to

withstand 26g for pilots and 21g for passengers. "Customers from other countries will be offered the new C1," says Socata, which has most of the C2's improvements without its increase in maximum take-off weight and performance. Both replace the 700B in production.

Grob, meanwhile, has begun flight testing its four-seat G140TP turboprop and is set to receive European certification by the end of the year, leading to US certification two months later.

"We have opened the full flight envelope and already exceeded our 220kt maximum cruise target," says the German company. Grob says

the Rolls-Royce 250B17F-powered aerobatic aircraft will be priced at under €1.3 million (\$1.43 million). The G140TP is aimed at the training, utility and passenger market and up to 20 aircraft a year will be produced.

Meanwhile, the UK's Farnborough Aircraft hopes to clinch the first launch customers for its F1 single-engined air taxi by year-end. The company has begun presenting it to "serious" investors in Europe and North America. It is hoping to secure £80 million (\$127 million) in private investment to fund the remainder of the programme, which is on hold.



The TBM 700C2 offers an increased maximum take-off weight

IN BRIEF

CHALLENGER TEST

A fifth Bombardier Challenger 300 super mid-size business jet has entered flight testing, fitted with a fully functional production-standard interior installed by the company's Tucson, Arizona, completion centre, working with interior integrator DeCrane. The aircraft is being used for function and reliability testing leading to certification by mid-year. Interior certification is scheduled to follow aircraft type approval, clearing the way for the Challenger 300 to enter service later this year.

AIRPORTS GRAHAM WARWICK / WASHINGTON DC

NATA battles against Washington National ban

The US Federal Aviation Administration has been accused of "inexcusable" discrimination against non-scheduled air carriers by keeping Washington National Airport closed to Part 135 operators. National has been closed to all but scheduled airlines since the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks.

The US National Air Transportation Association (NATA) has filed a petition with the FAA to reopen Washington National, arguing the continuing ban on Part 135 operations is causing "serious harm" to its members and the travelling public. Before an American Airlines

Boeing 757 crashed into the nearby Pentagon on 11 September, a significant proportion of movements at National were non-scheduled operations, including corporate charters.

The petition argues the closure "unfairly, unreasonably and unlawfully" discriminates against commercial non-scheduled carriers, particularly as Part 135 operators of aircraft weighing 5,670kg (12,500lb) or more will be required to comply with a "state of the art" security regime under the US Transportation Safety Agency's new "Twelve-Five Rule", which takes

effect on 1 April.

The NATA argues the Twelve-Five Rule removes the last barrier preventing Part 135 operators accessing National, by imposing a security regime similar to that in place for scheduled airlines operating into and out of the downtown Washington DC airport.

Part 91 operations by privately owned aircraft, including business jets, are also banned at Washington National, despite efforts by the US National Business Aviation Association and General Aviation Manufacturers Association to convince the TSA that GA is no threat.